

In theaters

# “Jeff, Who Lives at Home”

An underachiever looks for meaning in the mundane



By Capt. Tristan Hinderliter



Near the end of “Jeff, Who Lives at Home,” the title character (played by Jason Segel) is stuck in traffic in a taxi while attempting to cross a bridge. He says to the cab driver, “Do you ever feel like you’ve waited forever to figure out what your destiny is, then when you do, it’s not that exciting?”

Jeff’s rhetorical question sums up the message it would seem the movie is trying to express.

The film, written and directed by brothers Mark and Jay Duplass, is ostensibly about family, marriage, infidelity and man’s search for the meaning in everyday occurrences. It’s a shame it doesn’t have anything interesting to say about any of those things.

The entire movie takes place in one day in the lives of Jeff, his brother Pat (Ed Helms) and their mother (Susan Sarandon). Jeff, as we know from the title, lives at home in their mother’s basement, where he spends his time smoking pot, watching television, and assigning significance to the happenstance.

Their mother dispatches him on an errand, which sets in motion the chain of events that drives the narrative structure of the film. What we are in for is some camerawork that is often jerky and includes a lot of close-ups; while I’m sure this was intentional, it was also distractingly bad. What we are not in for is good entertainment. Although billed as a comedy, the movie is painfully short on laughs. Mercifully, it’s short, with a run time of just 83 minutes.

Jason Segel can be funny and charming, as he proved in “I Love You, Man” and “Forgetting Sarah Marshall.” In this role, however, he’s just forgettable. He plays a 30-year-old who, we are told, has not had a girlfriend since high school. As a sadsack with no ambition, we can see why. While we may be sympathetic to this sensitive lost soul, Segel fails to connect with the audience in a meaningful way.

Ed Helms is also unremarkable as Jeff’s abrasive brother, Pat. The conflict between him and his unfaithful wife, Linda (Judy Greer) provides the backdrop for the day’s events. Their eventual confrontation in a hotel room, though, is anticlimactic because we don’t care enough about the characters.

Meanwhile, there is also a subplot involving their mother’s day at work, where we find out she has a secret admirer. As the narratives simultaneously unfold and reach resolution, the movie attempts to be a meditation on the nature of love and family. Unfortunately, it’s all too predictable.

Throughout the movie, Jeff, preoccupied with the M. Night Shyamalan movie “Signs,” is constantly looking for a hidden significance in every little thing, for meaning in the mundane. In this movie, the signs all point to one conclusion: skip it.

*“Jeff, Who Lives at Home” is rated R for drug use, language and adult situations.*